

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 SAJ-01 TRSE-00 ACDA-19 OMB-01 MC-02

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1727

INFO SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 5993

LONDON PLEASE PASS TO ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARTMAN AT OPENING OF
BUSINESS AUGUST 8.

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, BEXP, BE, NATO

SUBJECT: MULTINATIONAL FIGHTER PROGRAM

1. IN OUR JUDGMENT, THERE IS STILL A CHANCE THAT THE
BELGIAN GOVERNMENT CAN BE PERSUADED TO PURCHASE THE FY-16
OR FY-17 TO REPLACE THEIR F-104S. THE ODDS ARE AGAINST
US BUT WE THINK THE PROSPECTS ARE GOOD ENOUGH TO WARRANT
MAKING A MAJOR EFFORT TO INFLUENCE THE BELGIANS. TO
IMPROVE THESE PROSPECTS, WE CONSIDER IT ESSENTIAL TO
ENCOURAGE PUBLIC DEBATE IN EUROPE AND TO IMPROVE OUR
ECONOMIC PACKAGE.

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2. IT IS COMMONLY ASSUMED AND WE CONTINUE TO RECEIVE INDICATIONS THAT THE BELGIAN MINISTER OF DEFENSE, VANDEN BOEYNANTS, IS COMMITTED TO THE ACQUISITION OF FRENCH MIRAGE F-1/M53. THE POSITION OF BELGIAN AIR FORCE IS MIXED: THEY RECOGNIZE THE MILITARY SUPERIORITY OF THE U.S. AIRCRAFT BUT, APPARENTLY UNDER PRESSURE FROM VANDEN BOEYNANTS, ARE RECONCILED TO RECEIVING THE F-1/M53 AND APPEAR TO PREFER A COMMITMENT FOR THE FRENCH AIRCRAFT RATHER THAN RISK NOT GETTING ANY FUNDS FOR AN AIRCRAFT TO REPLACE THE AGING F-104S.

3. HOWEVER, THE FINAL DECISION BETWEEN COMPETING AIRCRAFT HAS NOT YET BEEN TAKEN BY THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT ACCORDING TO OUR MOST KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCES. IN AN ANSWER TO A DIRECT QUESTION, DAVIGNON SAID THAT THE FOREIGN OFFICE HAD NOT YET TAKEN A POSITION. HE DOUBTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD MAKE A DECISION BEFORE THE END OF OCTOBER. GRAULS, TINDEMAN'S CHEF DE CABINET, TELLS US THE THE DECISION WILL BE MADE BY THE ENTIRE BELGIAN COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, CHAIRED BY TINDEMANS.

4. IN A SITUATION LIKE THIS, WHERE THE DEFENSE MINISTER APPEARS TO BE COMMITTED TO THE MIRAGE F-1/M53, THE AIR FORCE IS UNWILLING TO BUCK VANDEN BOEYNANTS AND NOT TO BE EXAMINING THE VARIOUS PLANES ON THE BASIS OF THEIR MILITARY CAPABILITY, AND WHERE THE OTHER MINISTRIES HAVE NOT YET DECIDED, WE THINK THAT U.S. INTERESTS WOULD BE BEST SERVED BY EXTENSIVE PUBLIC DEBATE IN BELGIUM. THIS APPEARS TO US AS THE BEST MEANS TO MAKE IT POLITICALLY DIFFICULT FOR THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT TO CHOOSE AN INFERIOR PLANE.

5. EITHER THE FY-16 OR FY-17 IS GREATLY SUPERIOR TO THE MIRAGE F-1/M53 AS AN AIR COMBAT FIGHTER. THE DIFFERENCES IN ABILITY TO CLIMB, ACCELERATE, AND MANEUVER ARE STUNNING; AND ONLY THE AMERICAN FIGHTERS WILL MEET SHAPE MILITARY REQUIREMENTS. THESE ARE OUR STRONGEST POINTS AND WE SHOULD TRY TO DEVISE WAYS TO GET THIS ACROSS TO A SELECTED BELGIAN AUDIENCE. BUT THIS IS NOT LIKELY TO BE GOOD ENOUGH. WE WILL ALSO
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NEED TO PERSUADE THE BELGIANS THAT THE ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL BENEFITS ARE SUBSTANTIAL. PERHAPS WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO GO AS FAR AS THE FRENCH, BUT WE SHOULD ENDEAVOR TO OFFER AN ATTRACTIVE A PACKAGE AS POSSIBLE.

6. TO THESE ENDS, WE HAVE MADE SEVERAL SUGGESTIONS:
(A) WE HAVE REPORTED LOCAL PRESS PLAY OF THE ISSUE (BRUSSELS 5696) AND HAVE PROPOSED TO DECLASSIFY CERTAIN

STATEMENT MADE BY DEP SECDEF CLEMENTS TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MULTINATIONAL FIGHTER COMMITTEE ON JULY 11 (BRUSSELS 5697) IN ORDER TO ENCOURAGE INFORMED PUBLIC DEBATE HERE.

(B) WE HAVE SUGGESTED HAVING DOD AND /OR NORTHROP AND GENERAL DYNAMICS INVITE SELECTED BELGIAN JOURNALISTS SPECIALIZING IN ECONOMIC AND AVIATION MATTERS TO SEE THE US AIRCRAFT FLYING (BRUSSELS 5951).

(C) FOR TACTICAL REASONS, WE HAVE URGED THAT FORTHCOMING SECDEF INVITATION TO CONSORTIUM MODS TO VISIT WASHINGTON DURING SECOND WEEK OF SEPTEMBER BE EXPEDITED (BRUSSELS 5952).

(D) WE HAVE TRANSMITTED THE CONSORTIUM REQUEST FOR MORE PRECISE PRICE DATA AND A CONFIGURATION DESCRIPTION UPON WHICH THE ESTIMATES ARE BASED (CMAAG 475-051151Z AUG 74). WE WISH TO STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF PROVIDING THIS INFO PRIOR TO THE FOUR NATION CONSORTIUM MEETING IN BRUSSELS ON AUGUST 14-16 TO PREPARE A REPORT FOR DEFENSE MINISTERS.

7. BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR HERE IS ECONOMIC. THE BELGIANS ARE PREOCCUPIED WITH THE ECONOMIC OFFSET ARRANGEMENTS OF THE VARIOUS OFFERS. THE CONSORTIUM'S COUNTER-PROPOSAL (CMAAG BRUSSELS 456) FOCUSSED ENTIRELY ON THIS ASPECT OF THE CLEMENT'S JULY 11 MEMORANDUM. THE CONSORTIUM PROPOSED THAT THE 4 COUNTRIES PRODUCE 10 PERCENT OF THE COMPONENTS OF THE US PLANES, 40 PERCENT OF THE COMPONENTS OF THE EUROPEAN PLANES, AND 20 PERCENT OF THE COMPONENTS OF THIRD COUNTRY PLANES, INSTEAD OF THE DOD PROPOSAL FOR A 10-50-10 DISTRIBUTION OF THE 4 COUNTRIES' PRODUCTION OF COMPONENTS. THIS PROPOSED CHANGE IS CRUCIAL TO THE BELGIANS. THE BELGIAN AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY CANNOT GEAR UP TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE 50 PERCENT OFFER FOR THE EUROPEAN PRODUCTION, BUT A LARGER SHARE OF THE
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THIRD-COUNTRY SALES MARKET WOULD ASSURE A LONG AND STABLE PRODUCTION RUN FOR THE BELGIAN PARTICIPANTS IN THE LWF PROJECT. THE LATTER CONSIDERATION IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT IN BELGIUM WHERE MOBILITY OF SKILLED LABOR IS LOW AND INDUSTRY'S COMMITMENT TO EMPLOYEES ONCE HIRED IS HIGH. IF WE WANT TO MAXIMIZE OUR CHANCES OF SELLING ONE OF OUR PLANES, WE SHOULD EXERT OURSELVES TO MOVE AS FAR AS POSSIBLE TOWARD THE 10-40-20 PROPOSAL. AN OUT-OF-HAND REJECTION WOULD MAKE IT EXTREMELY DIFFICULT FOR THOSE IN THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT WHO ARE FAVORABLY INCLINED TOWARD THE US PLANES. IN OUR JUDGMENT, THIS IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT VARIABLE IN DETERMINING WHETHER THE BELGIANS BUY AN AMERICAN PLANE. RENNER

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